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President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 41 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/56/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/642)

Draft resolutions (A/56/L.19, A/56/L.20, A/56/L.21, A/56/L.22)

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Middle East issue is a burning issue of very long standing and one about which the international community is extremely concerned.

Although the people of Palestine have achieved partial self-determination in Gaza and the West Bank, after experiencing many years of warfare, achieving a just and lasting solution to the Middle East issue still seems remote, since the peace talks between Palestine and Israel have taken so many twists and because existing agreements between the two sides remain to be fully implemented. This new round of violence in the conflict between Palestine and Israel, which began in September 2000, has continued for a long time, has led to many innocent civilian casualties and huge property losses on both sides, particularly on the Palestinian side. It has also led to increasing tension in the region, making the Middle East peace process even more difficult and complicated. Recent developments are having an increasingly negative impact on peace and stability in the world.

We have noted the positive efforts of the parties concerned since last September to de-escalate the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis and to resume the peace talks between the two sides. We express our appreciation for those efforts. Regrettably, however, the violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis has not stopped; it continues to escalate, and the situation in the Middle East, rather than improve, has further deteriorated. Security is far from being safeguarded by either side and both peoples continue to live in the shadow of violence and conflict.

It is therefore necessary for the international community and the parties concerned to draw profound lessons from the situation. It has been repeatedly demonstrated in the past and currently in the Middle East that conflict and confrontation will only serve to deepen mutual hatred and complicate issues, while dialogue and negotiation are the only way to peace.

The Security Council, which has a special responsibility for maintaining international peace and security, should play an important role in promoting a solution to the Middle East question. Its overriding priority now is to take resolute action to end the violence and ease tensions as soon as possible and to fulfil the promise to protect civilians in armed conflict.

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The issue of the Middle East has a close bearing on international peace and security as a whole. An early end to the Palestine-Israeli conflict and the realization of peace in the Middle East are therefore in the fundamental interests of all. We strongly appeal to the two sides to earnestly implement their existing agreements, respond actively to the mediation efforts by the international community and return to the negotiation table at an early date. We also hope that those parties that have an influence on the two sides will play a positive role in promoting an end to the conflict as well as the early resumption of the peace talks.

At the core of the Middle East issue lies the question of Palestine. Without the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinians, including their right to independent statehood, it will be impossible to arrive at a fair, just and lasting solution to the issue of the Middle East. We have always maintained that relevant United Nations resolutions on this issue and the principle of land for peace are the basis for Middle East peace talks, and that the faithful implementation of existing agreements and understandings between the two sides constitutes a precondition for their mutual trust.

The Chinese Government and people have all along supported the just cause of the Palestinian people in restoring their legitimate national rights. We welcome all efforts by the international community to restore regional stability and will work, as always, with the rest of the international community to make a positive contribution to the realization of a comprehensive and just solution to the issue of the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Mr. Thayeb (Indonesia): The coincidence of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which was held yesterday, and the consideration by the General Assembly of the question of Palestine is a solemn reminder to Member States of the United Nations that, more than half a century since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), the Palestinian people have yet to exercise their right to self-determination and independence. Over the years, scores of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions have been adopted, but they remain unimplemented.

The great hopes and optimism generated by the Madrid Peace Conference a decade ago, and by numerous subsequent peace agreements and accords, have all but dissipated, and the rhetoric on paper can hardly be said to have made any tangible improvement in the lives of the people in the occupied territories. The Palestinian people remain dispossessed of their lands and continue to be deprived of their right to return to their homeland. The economic gains made during the heady days of the peace process have vanished, with the nascent economy being placed in a very precarious situation by the occupying Power.

Today the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories is tragically spiralling rapidly out of control, resulting in the breakdown of the peace talks, escalating violence on the ground and the subjection of the Palestinians to illegal occupation. As the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has chronicled, during the course of the past year alone there have been scores of casualties, inflicted mainly on the civilian population. Of great concern is the use of deadly military force to suppress the outbreak of Palestinian protests against occupation. Also alarming is the resort to selective assassination of Palestinian leaders, which in the process has claimed even more lives of innocent bystanders, including children.

On the other hand, the occupying Power's illegal settlement activities continue unabated, coupled with its military incursions into territory already under Palestinian control. How can such a state of affairs be allowed to exist without grave ramifications for the region in particular, as well as for the peace and security of the world at large?

Since the unravelling of the peace process and the recent crisis in the region, the international community has voiced its deep dismay at the atrocities perpetuated against an entire nation and its people. It was against that backdrop that the Security Council met several times over the past year to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Regrettably, the Council was not able to take any tangible action, such as sending international observers to the occupied territories to protect Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation and to maintain a measure of peace and security.

It is also pertinent to mention the convening of the fifth special session of the Commission on Human Rights, in October 2000, at the behest of the overwhelming majority of member countries, to

address the serious deterioration of the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. That resulted in the adoption of several strong measures by the Commission, incorporated in its resolution S-5/1. It is indeed untenable that demands set forth in that resolution are being ignored while the occupying Power flagrantly violates the Fourth Geneva Convention. It is in that context that my delegation supports the endeavours to reconvene, at Geneva on 5 December, the Conference of High Contracting Parties in order to ensure respect for the provisions of the Convention and to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people.

There can be no alternative but for the parties to move forward to restore calm in the occupied territories, thereby enabling an environment conducive to the resumption of peace negotiations. That should be a priority for the international community. As unequivocal condemnation was voiced at the violence and terror inflicted on innocent civilians in the aftermath of the horrific terrorist attacks on 11 September, so too should we be mindful of the onslaught of violence and terror against the people in the occupied territories, coupled with the foreign occupation of the lands.

Violence begets violence and serves no purpose. It certainly does not provide for any degree of security. Security can prevail only if there is stable peace and if a people's yearning for freedom and independence is realized. What is at stake here is the urgency of attaining a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, and especially enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in accordance with all relevant United Nations resolutions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law.

It has been our steadfast position that for peace to endure, it must be achieved within the framework of international legality and on the basis of the following principles: the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from other occupied territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination.

In an environment of deepening crisis and a relapsed peace process, the Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba understandings were small but important steps to bridge the differences between the parties. Likewise, the Mitchell report offered some practical recommendations for a return to the peace negotiations. The Palestinian leaders demonstrated great sagacity and commitment to the peace process by accepting those recommendations as a stepping-stone to move forward.

It is self-evident that international efforts are central to ending this conflict, including the assistance of the United Nations and the co-sponsors of the peace process. We have also taken note of the statement made by the United States "to work towards the day when two States — Israel and Palestine — live peacefully together". Also significant is its announcement regarding contributing actively to a third-party monitoring and verification mechanism for a ceasefire acceptable to both sides and to the implementation of the Mitchell and Tenet plans, as well as to work with the international community to help rebuild the Palestinian economy.

Let us in the international community therefore seize this opportunity and redouble our concerted efforts to bring finality to the issue of Palestine and thus make the vision of peace, security and sustainable development a reality for all the Palestinian people.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka has continuously and consistently extended its firm and unqualified support to the people of Palestine.

Yesterday, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestine People, the President of Sri Lanka, Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, reaffirmed such support in her message, in these words:

> "I wish to reiterate unequivocally Sri Lanka's firm and unwavering support for the people of Palestine in their continuing struggle under President Yasser Arafat's leadership to achieve their inalienable rights, legitimate aspirations and yearning for statehood.
>
> "Consistent with this policy, Sri Lanka has accorded formal recognition to a State of Palestine. It is deeply gratifying to note that there is growing international recognition of the urgent imperative to end occupation and establish a

Palestinian State as a just and durable basis for peace in the region."

It has been one of the principal responsibilities of the United Nations to maintain international awareness on the subject of the people of Palestine. It is a responsibility that the General Assembly, in particular, has discharged conscientiously through its annual consideration of the reports of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which address the depressing and troubling circumstances of the Palestinians of the occupied territories.

To the Chairman of the Committee, the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, and to the Committee as a whole, much appreciation is due and should be conveyed, and I do so on behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka.

To those of us who in earlier years expressed support for a State of Palestine, the now evolving general, explicit, international recognition of the legitimacy of, and necessity for, a State of Palestine is a most impressive and a most significant development.

The tragedy is that, to reach this stage, there has had to be so much pain, suffering, death and destruction, to which there still seems to be no end. Justice and peace still remain elusive. There was a time last year when there were glimmers of hope that developments in the peace process might possibly, in the not too distant future, lead to tangible improvements in the unfortunate circumstances in which the Palestinians of the occupied territories live out their lives. There were, however, the tragic occurrences of the closing days of September 2000 in East Jerusalem and the ensuing, engulfing violence that still continues.

It is unquestionable that there is a yearning for peace. Yet for peace to be achieved, there has to be a return to the peace process. Until such time as the peace process is satisfactorily concluded, contemporary human rights standards and obligations and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention must surely be fully recognized and fully honoured.

The report before us in the General Assembly today — the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — tells of a severity of control, unknown before, that has settled on the occupied territories. The cycle of violence and counter-violence, violence and counter-violence, continues. There are hostile confrontations almost daily between Israeli forces and the Palestinians. The Israeli authorities have enforced their systems of civilian and military regulation with extraordinary intensity.

The heightened tension and violence since September 2000 have caused death and injury to a great number of Palestinians and Israelis, with Palestinians suffering by far the greater casualties.

There are other grave aspects to the occupation: the complex system of controls imposed on the movement of persons, vehicles and goods into and out of, between and within the occupied Palestinian territories; checkpoints, curfews and closures, resulting in what has often been referred to as a state of siege; settlements; the destruction of Palestinian homes and lands; and the disproportionate and excessive use of military force.

The overall consequences of such a manner of occupation have had catastrophic effects on the occupied territories as a whole: disruption of trade and employment and the ensuing general poverty; disruption in the provision of health services; disruption in schools and in the lives of the children; disruption in the provision of public services; disruption in education, and distraught and depressed parents; inadequacy of public revenues; and an all-pervasive cloud of frustration, desperation and hopelessness that appears to have enveloped all the occupied territories.

The conditions of the Palestinians in refugee camps are particularly distressing. They have no means of subsistence outside the refugee camps. When access to and exit from a refugee camp are closed and the Palestinians in a refugee camp are unable to obtain employment outside the camp, they, their families and their children are without any means of subsistence.

A sense of overwhelming despair appears to have enveloped the occupied territories, the countries of the region and the international community as a whole. It is to the Mitchell report and the steps being taken pursuant thereto that all now seem to turn in great expectation. One can only hope that there will soon be a return to the processes of dialogue and peace, leading to the day when all States in the region will live together peacefully in security and friendship, within internationally recognized borders.

The direct and indirect consequences of a general occupation of peoples and territories for such a long period of time are traumatic in the most profound ways — reaching across the entire spectrum of human relationships and affecting so unhappily the occupied, as well as the occupier.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is once again considering the question of Palestine, as it has done in past years. Our meeting today is taking place against the background of a deterioration of the situation in the Middle East on the whole and a standstill in the peace process. It is a source of deep concern that the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which has been critical since the Al-Aqsa intifada in September, should enter into its second year without any tangible easing of tensions, despite the many international efforts that have been made to restore security and to give the peace process another chance.

The situation has further deteriorated, owing to the dangerous escalation of practices by the Israeli authorities in the occupied territories that violate relevant United Nations resolutions and international agreements signed by the Israeli and Palestinian sides. Israel has forged ahead with a policy of aggression against a defenceless Palestinian people, and has used excessive, disproportionate military force to attack Palestinian civilians and elected officials through its so-called targeted assassinations. This is actually a policy aimed at the physical liquidation of people, which runs contrary to international and humanitarian laws, and also to logic. Israel has also launched raids on areas that fall under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and has reoccupied them. Furthermore, it has gone ahead with building new settlements, subverting Palestinian authorities, uprooting trees and demolishing Palestinian houses with a view to gaining time and consolidating a fait accompli. These practices, which are continued by Israel within the framework of a consistent and elaborate policy, run entirely contrary to international law, particularly humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949.

Israel is defying repeated appeals made by various international organizations, foremost among which has been the United Nations, calling for respect for international legitimacy and United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

This bloody confrontation has had a negative impact on the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The repeated closures of towns and villages and the economic blockade practiced by Israel have caused heavy losses for the Palestinian economy and have led to an alarming rise in the levels of unemployment, poverty, despair and suffering, resulting in a humanitarian tragedy for Palestinians in the occupied territories, whose lives, safety and security are targeted. This can only serve to exacerbate the tension and instability.

Tunisia, which has been following with great concern the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, would like to reiterate its condemnation of the constant attacks carried out by the Israeli Army against innocent civilians and their property and their holy sites. We also condemn the repeated assassinations that are being carried out by Israelis.

Tunisia also reaffirms its full solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for their just cause, on all levels, and their legitimate struggle to regain all their inalienable rights, including the right to establish an independent State on their land, with the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

We firmly believe that this critical situation, more than ever before, requires the United Nations and the Security Council, in particular, to shoulder their responsibilities in dealing with the deteriorating situation by providing urgently the necessary protection to Palestinian civilians and by implementing the recommendations contained in the Mitchell and Tenet reports so as to get Israel to renounce its practices.

Tunisia, which has always seen peaceful and political settlement as a strategic option, once again urges the international community and the sponsors of the peace process to exert further efforts to bring Israel to recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, to participate in a serious and responsible manner in the peace process and to respect international law and United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principle of "land for peace."

The establishment of a just and lasting peace in the region requires, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and decisions, the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territory.

Tunisia notes with satisfaction the position recently put forward by the United States President George Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell, which supports the establishment of a Palestinian State in line with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. We hope that these positions will be translated into practical and concrete initiatives on the basis of a well-defined, agreed-upon agenda to pave the way for putting an end to violence and calming the situation and for pursuing the path of peace towards the provision of a just solution.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation and to salutations to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the actions it has carried out to ensure the implementation of the rights of the Palestinians and make them a reality. This work must continue until we reach a final solution to the question of Palestine by establishing an independent Palestinian State, with the holy city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Mannan (Bangladesh): Today, the United Nations is observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is befitting that the General Assembly has commenced the debate on the question of Palestine under agenda item 41 to coincide with the event. With your permission, Mr. President, we will combine our intervention on this agenda item with agenda item 42 on the Situation in the Middle East.

It has already been three and a half decades since the Palestinians fell under illegal occupation by Israel. Yet their fundamental rights to self-determination and to a sovereign State have remained unrealized. Millions of Palestinians still live in refugee camps, deprived of their natural right to return to their ancestral home. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People eloquently documents the continued violation of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people in the occupied territory. We owe our appreciation to Ambassador Papa Louis Fall and members of his Committee for presenting us the report in document A/56/35.

The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and successive agreements, from Oslo to Sharm el-Sheikh, generated euphoria, hope and optimism in the region, and peace seemed near and real. Regrettably, the hope soon withered away and was overtaken by the hostility and confrontation that had engulfed the region prior to the beginning of the peace process. The situation has once again become volatile. The Palestinian intifada that followed the highly provocative visit of then-opposition leader Ariel Sharon to Al-Haram Al-Sharif resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian civilians. Tens of thousands were wounded and permanently disabled, a large number of them women and children. Now, over a year later, not a single day passes without the media bringing us news of bloody events in the occupied territory.

My delegation is appalled by the recent aggressive reoccupation of Palestinian cities and villages. These actions have exacerbated the already volatile situation in the Middle East. The international community has raised its voice in rejection of this attitude and has demanded that Israel withdraw its troops from Palestinian self-rule areas without delay in order to facilitate the return of a climate of trust for making peace. We therefore reiterate our demand for a full and immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Palestinian self-rule areas and that they return to positions held prior to September 2000.

Israel has continued to pursue a policy of collective punishment in the form of closures, blockades and restrictions of movement imposed on the people of the occupied territories. Under the pretext of security, these acts are being deliberately perpetrated by Israel with the purpose of demoralizing the Palestinian people. Restrictions on the movement of people and goods within the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories and other areas have had a devastating effect on the already fragile Palestinian economy. This is unacceptable, and we reiterate our condemnation of this policy.

The Israeli policy of confiscation of land with a view to expanding the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian land has been the major source of threat to the peace process. The international community has urged Israel to refrain from such acts, since their continuation would create further imbalances in the population structure of the cities. It is also a clear violation of the relevant resolution adopted by the Security Council.

In the course of the past year, Israel has resorted to a policy of targeted assassination of Palestinian political activists and leaders. At least 50 Palestinians have been killed in these targeted attacks by Israeli security. These extrajudicial killings by the Israeli authorities are a clear violation of international law and civility. We add our voice to the international community's unequivocal condemnation of these criminal acts and urge Israel to cease forthwith.

The present situation in the Middle East makes it incumbent upon the international community to put the peace process back on track. In this connection, Bangladesh fully endorses the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee and the Tenet plan as confidence-building measures to restore the dialogue. We commend the Palestinian leadership for accepting the report in its entirety. But we regret that Israel, on the other hand, continues to impose conditions for the implementation of these recommendations. We urge the sponsors of the peace process to exert pressure on Israel to start implementing the recommendations in a comprehensive manner, without preconditions. In this regard, we are encouraged to note recent initiatives indicating a more active involvement of the international community in this issue.

The situation in the occupied Syrian Golan is not very different. The Israeli leadership has never pursued serious negotiations with Syria within the framework of the Arab-Israel peace process. Rather, it has made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of the area by establishing new settlements and imposing its laws on Syrian citizens in contravention of all relevant Security Council resolutions. Bangladesh condemns such attempts. We call upon Israel to see reason and to end occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied parts of southern Lebanon in the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1981) and 252 (1968).

Bangladesh reiterates its total support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. We reaffirm that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility in the Middle East until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement is reached. We believe that the active involvement of the United Nations and the international community is essential in this endeavour. Bangladesh views with satisfaction the resumption of the active role of the United States of America. Palestinians are the victims of the worst tragedy of humankind, and we all have a moral responsibility to support their legitimate cause.

The President took the Chair.

We have every confidence that the ennobling spirit of the faiths that emanates from the Holy Land will ultimately prevail, and the time will indeed come when the Muslim, the Christian and the Jew shall live side by side in peace and harmony as all those faiths enjoin. Bangladesh can hope for nothing more.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): As we take up the question of Palestine, I am obliged to thank the Secretariat for the comprehensive and exhaustive report prepared for us in order to better guide us in our discussions on a subject whose importance and relevance today no longer need to be underscored. Yesterday morning we had a foretaste of this, with the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

While on the subject of that commemoration, allow me to take this opportunity to address my warmest congratulations to my friend Ambassador Papa Louis Fall of Senegal on his well-deserved election as head of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and also to pay tribute to his predecessor, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka.

We must emphasize that the Committee does useful work, and we hope the day is not far off when its efforts will come to fruition, when a sovereign and independent Palestinian State on free Palestinian land will rise from the ruins of so much violence, frustration and despair.

It is worth recalling the elements that should serve as a basis for any just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question. On the one hand, there should be strict compliance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and, on the other hand, respect for the following fundamental principles: the withdrawal of Israel to the former status quo — that is, to the 1967 borders; the guarantee for all States of the region to live in peace, within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; the recognition and the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily their right to self-determination; and international reassurance for the State of Israel.

It is gratifying to note that the international community has made praiseworthy efforts to help realize those principles through, for example, special sessions of the General Assembly, the meetings of the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention and meetings of organizations such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States.

But have the results met our hopes and expectations? At the moment, that seems doubtful: although we are optimistic about an ultimate settlement of the dispute, the serious exacerbation of the conflict is by no means encouraging. The glimmers of hope sparked by the peace process in 1993 and by the ensuing decisive action have quickly been extinguished. In their place we see bloody, deadly clashes between Israelis and Palestinians that day after day claim many victims, a majority of them women and children. The many acts of provocation and manifestations of despair such as suicide attacks reflect the extent to which the whole peace process has deteriorated. In the face of this predicament, the United Nations unquestionably stands at a crossroads.

General Assembly resolution 52/52, based on the principle of land for peace and one of the cornerstones of a settlement of the Palestinian question, remains a dead letter, as do other key resolutions such as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). But one thing is certain: the question of Palestine will not be resolved by force of arms, but only through negotiations, through dialogue. In that connection, the Oslo and Wye River agreements between the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization must not be set on a back burner; they must be fully reinvigorated in the framework of a renewed peace process.

The United Nations is certainly central to that process, and must therefore shoulder its responsibility. For that matter, all those of goodwill must play their part in the quest for peace. History abounds with examples of thoughtful, unified mobilization by the international community that has been decisive in averting the gravest of dangers. Three examples of the power of solidarity and united action were the victories against colonialism, Nazism and apartheid. The Palestinian question ought to benefit from the same heightened awareness and the same energy.

Burkina Faso is convinced that the new prospects opened up by the Mitchell report and by recent United States promises and initiatives since the outbreak of violence in the occupied territories, along with the consensus that has emerged between the two parties, could raise new hope for a settlement of the question of Palestine, but only if the main actors display goodwill, mutual understanding and tolerance.

Mr. Mubarez (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Once again, the General Assembly is considering the question of Palestine, which has remained unresolved for the past 50 years. Despite the numerous resolutions adopted by the United Nations and many attempts to forge a solution, such a solution continues to elude us, and the Palestinian people continue to wait resolutely and patiently. This problem was born simultaneously with the United Nations, and has become a touchstone of the effectiveness and credibility of the Organization and of the entire international community. Unlike on other issues discussed by the General Assembly, there is no need to go into all the causes and all the details.

The media daily report the number of fallen Palestinian martyrs. They report on the destruction that Israeli forces wreak on Palestinian property and homes. This painful cycle shows that, in spite of all that has been achieved in recent years, policies of force, occupation and expansion continue to plague the world. In recent years, there have been great changes in international relations; these have affected all the activities and priorities of the United Nations. The cold war is over, and we are no longer concerned about colonialism. But we face other problems, such as human rights, development, democracy, globalization and terrorism. And unfortunately, we continue also to face the Palestinian problem. This not only means that the Palestinians continue to suffer: the problem affects the entire world.

The Palestinian peace process is not complete because Israel is waging a disinformation campaign based on notions of security, self-defence and survival. But Israel's neighbours have now recognized its right to exist within its own boundaries; indeed, the Palestinian Authority has recognized Israel's existence side by side with the Palestinian State. So here, Israel has no further pretext.

We have witnessed Palestinians demonstrating, and we have seen children throwing stones. There have been changes in the world, but the Israelis are clinging

to the past. Israel is in fact motivated by frantic expansionism and domination. It wishes to expand into the Palestinian territories and other Arab lands. The Israeli Government accepted the recommendations of the Mitchell Committee, albeit with ill-grace and reservations. But Israel's expansionist policies continue in the occupied territories, as does its terrorist policy against innocent civilians, who are expelled from their lands and from their homes so that new settlements can be built. Tel Aviv announced that it would negotiate with the Palestinians, but at the same time we see systematic attempts to assassinate Palestinian leaders and leaders of civilian organizations.

It appears that the Israeli leadership is convinced that lies will become more acceptable with repetition. How else can we understand Israel's description of Palestinian demonstrations as acts of violence that must be stopped before negotiations can begin?

We have familiarized ourselves with the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The report shows that the Israeli allegations are false and makes clear the extent of the suffering of the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories must end.

However, there is a ray of hope: the positive stance taken recently by the United States. Indeed, President George Bush, speaking before the General Assembly, and his Secretary of State, Colin Powell, both have mentioned the need to bring to an end the occupation by Israel of Palestinian lands, in preparation for the establishment of a Palestinian state, side by side with Israel, with secure and internationally recognized borders and within the framework of international legitimacy.

Yemen welcomes this new American approach. We would like it to become a reality within a specified time frame, so that Israel cannot carry out any obstructionist manoeuvres. I hardly need recall that for years Israel has been refusing to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, so as to continue occupying Palestinian lands. This can be seen clearly in the note verbale from Israel addressed to the Secretary-General, as contained in document A/56/642, stating that:

> "Israel views the aforementioned General Assembly not only as being unbalanced, but also as an undue interference in matters which the parties have agreed to resolve within the context of direct bilateral negotiations." (*A/56/642, para. 4*)

Tel Aviv's position is well known. It wants to impose a fait accompli on the defenceless Palestinian people so as to alter the balance of power.

The Palestinian problem is linked to the interests of many parts of the region and elsewhere. This is what we have seen for 50 years now. The Israeli occupation must cease, as it contravenes internationally accepted principles. The United Nations must fulfil its responsibility towards the Palestinian people and work to promote a settlement that will enable the Palestinian people to be independent and to decide their own fate, just like other countries that have managed to free themselves of the yoke of foreign occupation.

In this context, Yemen would like to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts and to express our gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its work. We await the day when the United Nations and its organs will finally be able to come to the aid of the Palestinian people — not only the refugees, but the Palestinian people as a whole, so that they might finally realize their inalienable and legitimate rights.

Mr. Adekanye (Nigeria): It is a matter of grave concern to Nigeria that the question of Palestine remains unresolved and that the present Israeli-Palestinian crisis has entered its second year with an escalation of violence, creating mistrust and mutual recrimination as well as a vicious circle of violence and retaliation from which the peoples of the region have suffered enormously. The major casualty has been a lasting solution to the Middle East conflict, in which the international community set so great a store early this year. This development is captured in the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/56/642, whose paragraph 5 states that the present situation is "the worst crisis in the Middle East since the 1993 Oslo Agreement".

We commend the Secretary-General for his wide-ranging consultations with the Security Council and for his personal engagement in the search for a lasting solution. These efforts complement those of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority to de-escalate the current

situation and contribute towards a return to the negotiating table. It is reassuring that the Secretary-General has, in the process, also collaborated closely with other interested parties. We wish to encourage him in this endeavour.

Despite the gloom which pervades the Secretary-General's report, the Nigerian delegation believes that there is a glimmer of hope for peace and stability. First, we have, in the recommendations of the report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee — otherwise known as the Mitchell report — released last April, an important path towards the resumption of negotiations between the parties to the conflict. We believe that their full implementation should generate confidence and trust. The fact that the report has been accepted by both parties and enjoys widespread support by the international community strengthens our confidence in that regard. We enjoin the parties concerned to exert every effort towards the implementation of the report and of the Tenet Plan.

Secondly, there is now widespread support for the creation of a Palestinian state, side by side with Israel. It remains the firm conviction of Nigeria that the legitimate desire of the Palestinians to national independence and statehood and the equally legitimate claim of Israel to recognition and security are not mutually exclusive. We welcome in this regard the statement made by President George Bush of the United States to the General Assembly on 10 November 2001, affirming United States support for a Palestinian state, to exist side by side with Israel. Let us build upon the momentum generated by this latest development to resolve, once and for all, the question of Palestine.

Meanwhile, the international community must address the humanitarian, social and economic consequences of the current situation in the region. As the Secretary-General has pointed out in his report, the situation has had a devastating impact, with an increased level of poverty, misery and suffering among the population. The need to reverse this situation cannot be overemphasized. We therefore call for the normalization of the situation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, and we urge the international community, and particularly the Bretton Woods institutions, to redouble their efforts and assistance in rebuilding the economy and infrastructures of the Palestinian Authority. Such support should be based on the needs of the Palestinian people, as determined by their representatives. We are confident that donor support for United Nations agencies through new and additional resources would also enable these agencies to pursue with vigour the programmes earmarked for the region.

Finally, I wish to reaffirm Nigeria's support for the restoration of peace and stability in the Middle East. It is our hope that the parties to the conflict will spare no effort in the pursuit of their desired goal.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): Cyprus associates itself with the statement made by the Belgian presidency of the European Union.

The Government and the people of the Republic of Cyprus have repeatedly and consistently expressed sorrow and concern about the collapse of the peace process, the escalation of violence and the loss of so many lives as a result of events that have been continuing unabated for the past 14 months. The current situation aptly demonstrates once more the grave consequences of the long delay in bringing about a solution to the Palestinian problem. All interested parties, and the international community at large, should consider with the utmost seriousness and urgency the tragic reality of daily conflict.

We call once more for maximum restraint, since it has been demonstrated that any resort to violence not only fails to produce any tangible benefits but, on the contrary, aggravates an already tense situation. Time and again, Cyprus has stated that we share the view that the Palestinian issue constitutes the core of the Middle East conflict and that without its settlement the international community cannot attain its goal of finding a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East problem on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

We reiterate our long-held position that the acquisition of territory by war is inadmissible, and declare our support for the right of every State in the region, including Israel, to be able to live in security. We are particularly pained by the tragic loss of life of and injuries to innocent children. We believe that the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 1949 should be fully respected. In our view, solutions to international conflicts must safeguard the basic tenets of justice and international legality and maintain and restore the dignity of individuals. We believe that peace efforts and initiatives for the achievement of

peace and stability should be based on international law. It is important that solutions to problems should be perceived as fair, and accepted as such by the populations concerned.

Occupation, especially prolonged occupation, brings frustration, which can lead to acts of desperation. The Palestinian people must be able to look forward to the early prospect of an end to their plight. In this context, we reiterate our support for the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the creation of their own State. We express our opposition to the confiscation of Palestinian land, the restriction of movement of Palestinians, the deliberate destruction of their property and extrajudicial executions. We call for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Area A. Bearing in mind our own experience of the negative effects of illegal settlements on the achievement of peace, we reiterate our opposition to such settlements.

We are encouraged by the recent statement made by President Bush during this year's general debate regarding the envisaged solution for the Palestinian issue, providing for two states — Israel and Palestine — living peacefully together, within secure and recognized borders, as called for by Security Council resolutions. We would also like to welcome the speech of the Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, at the University of Louisville, and the consequent active involvement of the United States in the peace efforts. We believe that the international stature of the United States, and its influence with both sides, offer potential for moving beyond the current stalemate.

In general, we welcome every initiative capable of ushering in a new environment of stability and cooperation in this sensitive region. Cyprus has made its own contribution, including, inter alia, the hosting of meetings between representatives of the two sides in an effort to help restore dialogue and confidence. We reaffirm our readiness to assist again if requested to do so by both parties. We share the view that the inability of the international community to put an end to the unacceptable situation in the Middle East undermines the credibility of the system of collective security.

The Republic of Cyprus reiterates its support for the non-selective, comprehensive and immediate implementation of the provisions of the Mitchell report, which we hope will put an immediate end to the violence and create the necessary conditions for the resumption of the peace process and final status negotiations. In this respect, we fully subscribe to the position expressed by the European Union and other members of the international community concerning the need for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism to assist in the implementation of the report's recommendations.

We welcome the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1975) and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon last year. We reiterate our consistent position calling for the withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan.

In conclusion, we believe that the forces of moderation should be strengthened and those of the extremists should be isolated. Acts of terrorism should not be tolerated on the basis of any pretext. Outbursts of inflammatory rhetoric do a disservice to all sides, and the parties should instead work actively towards a win-win situation. Only thus will they manage to revive the hope of the vast majority of the peoples of our region for the establishment of a permanent peace and realize the vision for a new Middle East. For in that region — the cradle of three major religions and civilizations — coexistence is the only acceptable way. History has given us ample proof of that.

Mr. Sagach (Ukraine): For decades, the General Assembly has addressed the question of Palestine. This occasion reminds all of us of the historic responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the Palestinian issue — a responsibility that should be borne until the final and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the conflict in the Middle East, has been achieved.

Over recent years we have witnessed real progress and serious setbacks, the resumption of talks and outbreaks of violence, encouraging hope and deep despair in this volatile region. Regrettably, in this sequence of ups and downs in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the past year has been a particularly dark one. The Israeli and Palestinian parties seemed to be very close to reaching an agreement on very complicated and sensitive issues at Camp David not so long ago. Now they are further apart than they have ever been during the past decade.

Ukraine is concerned about the situation in the region, which remains critical. Since September 2000, it has been dramatically escalating and has turned into a large-scale confrontation that has claimed the lives of

more than 900 people, mostly Palestinians. It is particularly disturbing that the new outbreaks of violence in the Palestinian territory and within Israel almost every day are creating numerous additional victims and increasingly aggravating the situation in the entire region. We were shocked by the series of bloody acts of violence over the past months, in particular very recently, which almost shattered the slim hopes for the resumption of peace negotiations between the parties. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the remarkable progress achieved within the framework of the Madrid and Oslo peace processes has been brought practically to naught by 14 months of bloodshed.

The current situation requires that urgent steps be taken. Ukraine calls on the parties to the conflict to undertake resolute and immediate action to achieve a ceasefire and stop the bloodshed, to prevent the further escalation of violence and create the conditions necessary for a return to the negotiating table. At this crucial stage, both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders must display courage, flexibility and realism. The two parties must refrain from any unilateral actions that might lead to further complications or prejudge the outcome of the final status talks.

From our perspective, settlement activities by Israel in the Palestinian territories, as well as closures and economic sanctions against the Palestinians, are counterproductive. There can be no excuse for the excessive use of force against the Palestinian civilians and the reoccupation of Palestinian-controlled territories. It is our firm conviction that the practice of extrajudicial killings and devastating raids into Palestinian-controlled territory must cease.

Ukraine categorically rejects acts of terrorism as a means of reaching any political goal, regardless of who commits them and for what reason. We call on the Palestinian side to ensure that effective control be exercised over the radical elements in order to stop the abhorrent practices of suicidal bombings and terrorist attacks and to reduce incitements and provocations against the Israelis.

We are confident that implementation of the recommendations of the Mitchell report and the Tenet work plan, which were accepted by both parties and received the strong endorsement of the international community, constitute a solid basis for finding a way out of the ongoing crisis in the Middle East and for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation process. In order to achieve a lasting solution, this process should be based on the relevant Security Council resolutions — in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) — and the principle of land for peace, as well as other principles laid down at the Madrid Conference and in the Oslo Agreement.

The long and winding path of the Middle East peace process makes it increasingly obvious that the ultimate solution of the Palestinian issue lies in the establishment of a sovereign State of Palestine. We are convinced that the Palestinian people should be in a position to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and statehood and to live in peace and security. Their legitimate aspirations for justice, freedom, dignity and sovereignty are well understood and shared in Ukraine, which gained its independence just a decade ago.

At the same time, it is no less obvious that the final peace agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian parties should stipulate clear-cut guarantees for the State of Israel to live in security and peace within internationally recognized borders. We believe that the best way to ensure security guarantees for Israel would be through its development of mutually beneficial relations in all spheres and sound economic cooperation with other States in the region. In addition, it is only through negotiations that mutually acceptable and viable solutions to all of the complicated issues of permanent status can be reached, including those of the future status of the Holy City of Jerusalem and of the Palestinian refugees.

The present situation in the Middle East requires more decisive engagement of the international community and renewed diplomatic efforts by the sponsors of the peace process and all other international parties in order to help the two parties overcome their animosity and restore dialogue. Therefore, Ukraine welcomes the statements issued in the region last October by the representatives of the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union and the United Nations Special Coordinator. We also welcome the position statements made on the issue very recently by United States President George Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell.

There is no doubt that the United Nations should continue to discharge its permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in

conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Organization should remain a principal guarantor of international legitimacy with respect to the question of Palestine, as well as the headquarters of international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people. In this context, we consider the personal involvement of the United Nations Secretary-General in the Middle East settlement process a critically important factor. We support his mediation activities and encourage him to continue them.

Ukraine favours a more active role of the United Nations Security Council, which is entrusted with primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, in searching for ways to resolve the current crisis and bring about a solution to the issue of Palestine. As a non-permanent member of the Security Council, my country actively contributed to the adoption of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000) in October 2000, which provided an adequate and prompt response to the violence that had broken out in September 2000 in Jerusalem. It is regrettable, however, that since the adoption of that resolution, the Security Council has not found itself in a position to adopt unanimously new effective decisions on the matter in exercise of its Charter obligations. We hope that the Council will find it possible to reconsider such an approach shortly.

Ukraine stands ready to continue making its practical contribution to the international diplomatic efforts under way. In this context, I would like to mention that Ukraine has recently offered the Israeli and Palestinian parties its good offices, offering to provide on its territory a venue for their resumed negotiations at any appropriate time. We are glad that this initiative was well received by both parties.

In addition, I would like to recall another important event that took place recently in the relations between Ukraine and Palestine, namely the opening of the Diplomatic Mission of Palestine in Kyiv last October. In our view, not only has it broadened the channels of communication between the Ukrainian Government and the Palestinian Authority — thus fostering the development of our bilateral relations — but it may also contribute to the efforts to facilitate the normalization of the Middle East situation.

Finally, I would like to express our fervent hope that, through joint efforts on the part of the two parties, assisted by the whole international community, the question of Palestine will be resolved so that peace will return to the entire Middle East region and the peoples of Palestine and Israel will enjoy living side by side, in their own countries, secure and in peace, prosperity and dignity. Ukraine remains fully committed to helping them achieve this long-sought goal.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to convey to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the members of the Committee our sincere gratitude and appreciation for the great efforts they have exerted in supporting the legitimate and just Palestinian cause. I should like to take this opportunity to convey my deep appreciation for their most recent report, containing as it does important and valuable information that reveals some painful facts on the occupation practices and violations of Palestinian human rights being committed in the Palestinian territories.

The leadership, Government and people of the United Arab Emirates, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, reaffirm their continued support for the brotherly Palestinian people and their just struggle to fulfil their legitimate aspirations to self-determination, following the example of other peoples of the world.

Any student of the various stages of the history of the Palestinian question — specifically since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) of 1947, pursuant to which Palestine was divided into two states, one Palestinian, the other Israeli — must be disappointed by the continued obstructionist policy followed by successive Israeli Governments to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. This student will, inevitably, also feel deep regret and bewilderment about the continued aggression, injustice and violations of Palestinian human rights by Israeli occupation forces. In the face of this situation, we wonder whether the persistence of these inhuman and illegal circumstances of the Palestinian people, half of whom which have lived for decades in miserable refugee camps in an era known for respecting human rights, globalization and democracy, is acceptable. Ours is an era that deals with all kinds of colonialism, racial discrimination and other scourges of the age of the jungle that has long since disappeared. Is it conceivable that the international community, represented by the United Nations and other

international bodies, can be content with issuing resolutions and statements of condemnation — ineffective measures for facing down the ongoing Israeli policies of intensified occupation and settlement expansion year after year — without proceeding to take the necessary and effective action to put an end to these dangerous Israeli policies?

We consider the Al-Quds uprising and violence — protests that the occupied Palestinian territories have witnessed for more than 13 months — to be natural national reactions and an expression of the Palestinian people's rejection of its daily suffering under terrorism, extremism and collective punishment in its territories, which have been used to drain the peace agreements concluded under previous Israeli Governments of their substance and to disavow Israel's legal and political obligations under the principle of land for peace. The Israeli Government pursues these practices to achieve its well-known strategic aims of expanding illegal Jewish settlements, displacing and annihilating more Palestinians and confiscating their lands, and to create new pretexts and rationales for "ensuring" Israel's security in order to justify the unprecedented Israeli colonial expansion at the expense of the legitimate national and human rights of the Palestinian people.

One reason for concern is the fact that, while the Palestinian side agreed at the beginning of the peace negotiations to make important historical and political concessions in order to prove its good intentions to achieve a real peace in the area that would safeguard its most basic legitimate aspirations to self-determination and the establishment of its independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on half of the original area of its lands, the Israeli Government is engaged every day, in full view of the world, in new and riskier schemes. These schemes consist of murder, assaults, arrests, siege, closures, displacements, provocations to violence and the Zionist campaign against the Palestinian people and its National Authority. All these serve to cover up Israel's systematic and dangerous settlement expansion and confiscation of lands, water sources, energy and other natural resources; to usurp the citizenship and residence rights of the original Palestinian people in their cities and villages, in particular in Al-Quds Al-Sharif; and to expel more of them from their lands and replace them with Jewish immigrants, who come by the hundreds of thousands every year from all parts of the world.

The student of all these facts and tragic systematic events clearly realizes the real intentions of the Israeli Government, which is seeking to entrench its occupation of the Palestinian territories, in particular in the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and to alter their demographic, historical and religious character. That represents the worst direct violation of the principles of the Charter, the provisions of international law, relevant resolutions of the United Nations and human rights instruments, foremost among which is the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

The United Arab Emirates today renews its strong condemnation of all these shameful Israeli violations and expresses its continued concern over the laxity and general indifference of the Security Council, in particular its permanent members, as compared with the Council's increased attention to other security and peace issues on its agenda. We therefore call on the Council, its permanent members in particular, to abandon the policy of double standards; to work towards implementing urgent and necessary measures to protect the Palestinian people and its properties, institutions and national, economic and social interests; and to compel Israel to heed the calls for a full and unconditional withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab lands it occupies by force.

We also warmly welcome the new position of the United States of America, as expressed recently by President George Bush and his Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, in support of the establishment of a Palestinian State. We urge the international community, the United Nations and its specialized agencies in particular, to assume their full responsibilities towards the Palestinian question by redoubling their efforts and exerting every possible pressure on the Israeli Government to respect and implement the resolutions calling for an immediate end to all measures of war, excessive violence, settlement activity and violations of human rights directed against the Palestinians and their cities, and to implement all its other legal obligations under the series of peace agreements concluded with the Palestinian side in order to prove the good intentions that it announces every now and then in regard to peace and security in the area.

We affirm that a just, permanent and comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East can be achieved only through a full and unconditional withdrawal of

Israel from all the Palestinian and Arab territories it has occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Lebanese area of Shebaa, and through the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital and the removal of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, within the framework of the resolutions on international legality and in accordance with the principle of land for peace and with all Palestinian-Israeli agreements that Israel violates in full view of the world. If this does not come about, the Middle East, which is strategically important in terms of international economic relations, will continue to live in a state of tension, violence and instability that will, in turn, negatively affect regional and international peace.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

I should like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/56/L.19 to A/56/L.22 will be taken on Monday, 3 December 2001, in the morning, as the second item.

Agenda item 42

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/56/480, A/56/642)

Draft resolutions (A/56/L.23, A/56/L.24)

The President: I now give the floor of the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/56/L.23 and A/56/L.24.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset, to present the elements of the two draft resolutions under agenda item 42: A/56/L.23, entitled "Jerusalem" and A/56/L.24, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

Regarding the draft resolution entitled "Jerusalem", the three paragraphs of the preambular part recall previous resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on Jerusalem, all of which affirm that all the legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel with a view to changing or attempting to change the status of the city of Jerusalem are null and void and that they must be rescinded. It recalls Security Council resolution 478 (1980), which decides not to recognize the "Basic Law" declared by Israel, and it calls upon all countries with diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw them.

In operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly determines that Israel's decision to impose its laws and administrative measures on Jerusalem is illegal and therefore null and void.

In operative paragraph 2, the General Assembly deplores the decision by some countries to transfer their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem and calls on them to abide by the provisions of relevant General Assembly resolutions, in accordance with the Charter.

The draft resolution entitled "The Syrian Golan" recalls in its preambular part Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of land by force, in accordance with international law and the Charter. Moreover, it reaffirms the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the occupied Syrian Golan. The draft resolution expresses deep concern at Israel's failure to withdraw from the Syrian Golan, contrary to the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, and it stresses the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan. The last preambular paragraph expresses grave concern over the halt in the peace talks on the Syrian track and the hope that peace talks will soon resume from the point they had reached.

In operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution, the General Assembly states that Israel has failed to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981). The draft resolution also states that Israel's decision in 1981 to impose its laws on the occupied Syrian Golan is considered null and void, and it calls upon Israel to rescind its decision. The draft resolution also affirms the continued applicability of the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Syrian territory occupied in 1967. It also stresses that the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan constitutes a stumbling block to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

In operative paragraph 5, the draft resolution calls on Israel to resume the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect its commitments and obligations made during previous talks. In operative

paragraph 7, the draft resolution calls on all parties concerned and the sponsors of the peace process to exert all the necessary efforts to ensure the resumption of the peace process and its success by implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

In my statement to the General Assembly on 29 November, I presented the basic elements of Egypt's position on the question of Palestine. We hope that that position will yield results.

Today I wish to present the basic elements of Egypt's position on the situation in the Middle East in general. Egypt considers that the Palestinian question is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that its resolution is key to achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East.

At the same time, however, Egypt believes that a basic precondition to achieving comprehensive peace in the region is for the Israeli approach to peace to go beyond talking peace and then torpedoing it or postponing it or trying to impose principles other than those already agreed, foremost among which is the principle of land for peace.

In that context, we believe that any settlement between Israel and the Arab parties should be based on several equally important elements, namely, full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, agreement on mutual security arrangements, and the establishment of normal relations between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. Egypt would like to emphasize that until we arrive at a settlement that includes all these elements, Israel must, as the occupying Power, not take any measures on the ground that are contrary to its commitments under the provisions of international law and the resolutions of the United Nations. Moreover, Israel should not attempt to abort any real possibility for political dialogue.

The peace established between Egypt and Israel over 20 years ago was based on the full implementation of resolution 242 (1967) and consequently on the principle of land for peace. That settlement has therefore come to constitute a basic precedent for achieving peace between the Arab parties concerned and Israel. That means that Egypt bears special responsibility and is always obliged to refer to the foundations for peace that I mentioned, namely, full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and its removal of all settlements from those territories, reaching mutual and equal security arrangements with the consent of the parties concerned and, finally, establishing normal peaceful relations and good-neighbourliness.

Egypt believes that those elements, which are the basis of the formula known as the principle of land for peace, should apply to any settlement between Israel and the Arab parties concerned. In that connection, Egypt would like to reiterate that the implementation of Security Council 242 (1967) is an indivisible whole. We totally reject claims that this resolution should apply to one track of the peace process but not to another, or to some territories but not others. There is no legal foundation for such claims which, in fact, reflect a lack of clear understanding of the resolution. That resolution makes no differentiation, in letter or spirit, between territories occupied by Israel by force. All territories occupied by force in 1967 must be abandoned by Israel. This principle was consecrated in the Charter of the United Nations and has been applied by the Organization since its inception. It is a principle essential to the establishment of just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Along the same lines, I would like to reaffirm Egypt's position in support of Syria's right to regain full control over occupied Golan. That is the only way to establish peace between those two countries. I also wish to state that Egypt supports Lebanon's right to the Shab'a farms region. Similarly, I wish to say that failure to reach a settlement on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks will only serve to perpetuate existing tensions in the region, thereby delaying the establishment of peace in the Middle East.

Establishing a comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the real basis for comprehensive security for all parties in the region. In that regard, Egypt once again calls for the removal of all nuclear weapons from the Middle East. Moreover, within the framework of an initiative proposed by President Mubarak, Egypt has since 1990 called for the establishment of the Middle East as a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. In that context, I wish to refer to Israel's continued refusal to enter into any agreements or measures that would contribute to confidence-building with regard to inspection of its nuclear facilities. This is something that adds to political tension in the region, a place already considered a hotbed of tension. It is clear that the security that we seek for the Middle East

is the security of all the parties concerned, and not just that of one party or some parties. Comprehensive security is the true synonym for comprehensive peace.

We are still hopeful that efforts at achieving a genuine and comprehensive peace settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict will be crowned with success. However, that hope — which has been severely tried and shaken during the last 13 months — is based on Egypt's firm conviction that peace is the only option available to the Middle East region. I would like once more to stress that Israeli conduct should be in keeping with the objective we seek, namely peace. We hope that Israel will realize the need to alter its behaviour in the region so that the Arab parties may be convinced of its seriousness about peace; otherwise, the tensions prevailing in the Middle East will continue for a long time to come, with all the suffering that that entails for the peoples of the region.

In conclusion, I would like to state that Togo has become a sponsor of draft resolution A/56/L.23 on Jerusalem, and that Guinea and Togo have also decided to become sponsors of draft resolution A/56/L.24 on occupied Syrian Golan.

Ms. Iyer (India): We are gathered here once again to discuss the situation in the Middle East, a region of great importance and concern to the entire international community.

The relationship between India and the Arab world has been fashioned by history on the larger canvas of the meeting between the Indian and Arab civilizations. It covers almost every important aspect of human endeavour — cultural, social, religious and political. The Arab world played an important role in transmitting and interpreting Indian thought and culture to the Western world.

On our part, we were closely involved in the Arab world's interaction with the Orient. The impact of the Arabic and Islamic world on India itself has been profound and far-reaching, giving rise to a composite culture that is rich in its diversity and enduring in its essential unity. These geographic, economic and social factors have created a unique affinity between India and the Arab world. When we speak on the Middle East, therefore, we speak of a region we consider our extended neighbourhood and about countries with which our relations are particularly close and deep.

We had hoped that the withdrawal of Israel from southern Lebanon last year and the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the vacated areas would be a good portent, leading to progress on other tracks, and that prospects for lasting peace and tranquillity in the region would finally be within reach. Unfortunately, the situation since then has belied the optimism of the international community. There have been occasional outbreaks of firing across the Blue Line, though we feel that the presence of UNIFIL has been helpful. As a measure of India's commitment to peace in the region, we have contributed a battalion to UNIFIL, and the present Force Commander is an Indian General.

We regret very much that since September last year, the Middle East peace process seems to have stalled. There is a stalemate in peace negotiations on all tracks. India believes that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be established only on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. In India's view, the status of Jerusalem, as per the Madrid and Oslo process, is one of the final status issues, and it is yet to be resolved. India supports a resumption of negotiations on all tracks of the Middle East peace process to complete the circle of peace in West Asia.

Even before the developments of 11 September, the sense of frustration in the Arab world has never been so high. The second intifada is the manifestation of the mood of despair among the Palestinian people. These developments make it imperative to address the core problems of the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian issue. The requirement for peace and stability in the region has now become even more acute. The international community cannot fail in its obligations. At the same time, the parties concerned must reaffirm their commitment to resolve their differences peacefully through sustained negotiations. There is no military solution to this conflict; violence must be abjured. This is the only way to achieve lasting peace in the region.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): The Middle East has been through yet another year of violence and tragedy. The cost to both Palestinians and Israelis in terms of human suffering, bitterness, disillusionment and mistrust has been very, very high.

Violence, terrorism and military responses have once again proved ineffective as a means of resolving the Middle East conflict. The time has therefore come to resume the peace process in a spirit of confidence and compromise. The tragic and appalling events of 11 September have made progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict even more urgent.

Norway welcomes the commitment of the United States to intensifying its engagement in the Middle East peace process, as outlined by President George W. Bush before the General Assembly and by Secretary of State Colin Powell in his statement in Kentucky. We also commend the active diplomacy of the United Nations and others. The growing international consensus on how to approach the crisis is encouraging, since it is vital to find a solution to the conflict.

We need look no further for a way to end the violence and resume negotiations. The way out has been well described by the Mitchell Committee and in the Tenet understanding. Their recommendations must now be fully implemented; no further delays can be accepted. A failure to fully implement the Mitchell recommendations might have serious political and economic repercussions for the region. All efforts must be made to break the ongoing cycle of violence and create an atmosphere conducive to new progress in the peace process.

The Mitchell recommendations were devised as a package and must be regarded as such. To ensure success, any operational plan for implementation must address key security and political recommendations simultaneously.

Norway therefore urges Israel to refrain from further military incursions into areas exclusively under Palestinian administration, to end its policy of extrajudicial killings, to show restraint, to freeze all settlement activities, to end closures and to transfer the value added taxes owed to the Palestinian Authority.

In line with the international efforts, Norway urges the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority to do their utmost to end the attacks on Israel and Israelis, to bring to justice all known terrorists, to renew their commitment to the ceasefire announced on 26 September, to ensure full enforcement of Palestinian Authority orders regarding the ceasefire and to continue full security cooperation with Israel.

In our view, the implementation of the Mitchell recommendations and the Tenet understandings could be facilitated if the parties were provided with support in the form of a monitoring mechanism. Norway stands ready to participate in a possible future mission to monitor the implementation of the Mitchell plan, should the parties agree to it.

One of the main reasons why the attempts to resume final status negotiations have failed is the lack of a clear statement regarding the objectives of such negotiations. Norway calls on the parties to recognize the following objectives for the final status negotiations: for the Palestinians, an end to the occupation of their territories and the establishment of a viable and democratic State in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); for the Israelis, the right to live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. Only when both parties accept these goals explicitly will a resumption of final status negotiations have a chance of succeeding.

The Palestinian economy is in a severe recession after more than a year of intifada and subsequent closures of the Palestinian territory. The effects have been devastating. The Palestinian Authority is effectively bankrupt. Public services are beginning to collapse. Unemployment is higher than ever. The private sector is in crisis. The consequences for innocent civilians are incalculable.

In these very difficult circumstances, Norway remains committed to its role as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for assistance to the Palestinians. We will work together with the international community and continue to raise funds for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority. We are, of course, also committed to continuing our bilateral programme of economic assistance to the Palestinian people.

The destinies of the Israelis and the Palestinians are inseparable. Security for the Israelis depends on security for the Palestinians, and vice versa. Peace can be achieved only through mutual compromise. The parties must recognize that the path to peace will be hard and painful, but at the end of the tunnel, there will be an end to conflict.

The time has come for the Middle East leaders to embark once again on the road to peace. Final status negotiations must be resumed. As a friend of the Israeli

and Palestinian peoples, Norway reaffirms its readiness to assist the Israelis and the Palestinians in reaching a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict.

Mr. Ling (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): In our view, the Middle East peace process is now in the midst of one of the most difficult periods in its history of more than half a century. We are still feeling the consequences of the tragic events of September 2000 in East Jerusalem, which gave rise to a new destructive flood of bloodletting and suffering and cast doubt upon the basis of the vitally important compromises that were attained in Madrid and Oslo and subsequently reinforced in Washington with the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.

The Republic of Belarus views with deep concern the unceasing acts of violence in the region as a result of which people continue to die. We are deeply concerned about the irreversible damage that has recently been done to the prospects of achieving progress towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Against the background of the drawn-out escalation of the crisis, Belarus once again affirms its position of principle on the ruinous impact of any form of armed violence and terrorist activities in the region on progress towards a final settlement to the conflict.

We call on all sides, above all, to realize that every new shooting, missile strike, extrajudicial killing or explosion in the Middle East is a blow to the peaceful future of succeeding generations living in the region and to their right to live and work in their homeland, which is the cradle of three world religions.

The approach that Belarus takes to promoting peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Israelis in the long term is distinct and consistent. A just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is possible only if Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) are implemented and the basic principle of "land for peace" in the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese negotiations are put into practice.

In this context, what will undoubtedly be decisive is the level of political will on the part of the various parties to strictly abide by the obligations they have assumed, in particular, in the framework of Madrid peace conference and several ensuing implementation agreements. The cornerstone of the Middle East peace process remains the realization of the Palestinian people of their historical right to self-determination and the creation of an independent Palestinian State. Reaching such a goal will not be possible without wide international solidarity with the Palestinian people and the mobilization of massive political support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians.

Given the sharp deterioration of the social and economic situation of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and the increase in the number of Palestinian refugees, what is of particular significance is the combined efforts of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the donor countries and international organizations to provide the Palestinian people with economic, technical and humanitarian assistance. Stepping up the practical activities to this end is badly needed.

The present stage of development of the situation in the Middle East could be decisive for the future course of the peace process. The quickest way out from this impasse, which is bringing about new and entirely innocent victims, lies in reaching new agreements for the long term.

In this connection, we therefore count on decisive steps being taken on the part of the co-sponsors of the peace process aimed at renewing the Arab-Israeli dialogue on the basis the principle of strengthening trust, security and cooperation. The most recent statements by the President of the United States of America, George Bush, the Secretary of State Colin Powell, high-level officials of Russia and the member States of the European Union give cause for certain optimism in this connection. It is extremely important to maintain the momentum of the efforts in this direction, the initiatives contained in the recommendations by the fact-finding committee headed by George Mitchell and the subsequent agreements that have been reached through the good offices of George Tenet.

Belarus would like once again to underscore its adherence to the enduring responsibility of the United Nations and, above all, the Security Council for the peaceful settlement of the Middle East crisis in all its aspects. Our delegation is fully resolved to facilitate in the future the strengthening of the key role of the United Nations in the question of the Middle East.

In concluding, I would like to emphasize that the Republic of Belarus is firmly convinced that there is no alternative to renewing the peace process, which is the only way of ensuring respect for the inalienable rights

of all peoples of the Middle East to live in peace and security, within internationally recognized borders. We call on all sides to break the vicious circle of mutual violence and show a maximum of restraint so as to create an atmosphere that will promote the renewal of dialogue.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Middle East region is passing through a critical stage, as events are developing rapidly every day because of the continued Israeli occupation of Arab lands in Palestine and the Syrian Golan. This occupation is accompanied by abhorrent practices that make the Arab-Israeli conflict a constant reality that cannot be ignored, unlike other conflicts that have become part of history.

In discussing the two items concerning the question of Palestine and the Middle East, Kuwait evaluates the situation in the region in the light of developments relating to the Palestinian question, in particular, and to Arab-Israeli relations, in general. It has become clear to everybody that the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories is the main source of tension in the region.

I do not exaggerate when I say that the international parties concerned with the establishment of peace in our region will now face new challenges embodied in the frustration, anger and resentment that is felt by Palestinians and people in the region as a result of the abhorrent Israeli practices against innocent Palestinians and their national institutions. Therefore, rebuilding confidence and reassuring the peoples of the region are urgently needed at this stage in order to put an end to the violence and pave the way for the implementation of agreements signed within the framework of the peace process and subsequent agreements, in particular, the Mitchell recommendations.

Kuwait believes that the question of Palestine is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that peace will not be just and lasting in the region unless we take into account all the demands of the Palestinian people, which we have long been reiterating since the inception of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

Firstly, there is an urgent need for the full withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territories and areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority in accordance with United Nations resolutions, particularly, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and for Israel to implement the bilateral accords signed with the Palestinian Authority, so as to ensure that the Palestinian people regain their legitimate political rights, including the right to establish an independent State on their territory, with the Holy City of Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

I would like to stress the importance of supporting the demands of the Palestinian people, their right to Jerusalem, the refugees' right of return and the need to put an end to colonialist settlement policies and Judaization pursued by the Israeli Government.

Secondly, Israel must be pressured by all means possible to end its practices of repression and deliberate killing of innocent Palestinians, which lately have taken a new turn characterized by indifference and utter disregard for Arab sentiment. This deliberate policy is forging ahead, killing innocent citizens and children. The latest incident involved five students who were killed by explosives from an Israeli tank.

Israel's barbaric practices are a clear example of the violation of human rights and international humanitarian laws and instruments. They are also a clear violation of Security Council resolutions and statements pertaining to the protection of civilians in times of war and conflict, a subject on which the Security Council has been concentrating of late. In this context, I would like to call upon Security Council members to work for the establishment of a United Nations observer force that would guarantee the protection of Palestinian civilians, children in particular.

In support of the demands of the Palestinian people, Kuwait will continue to respond to humanitarian requirements through our on-going support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and, in accordance with decisions taken at Arab summits, by honouring our commitment to dispatching humanitarian assistance through the Kuwaiti Red Crescent Society to the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The Kuwaiti Red Crescent sent the last batch of assistance on 8 October.

Kuwait welcomes the recent new approach by the United States, its support for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and its insistence on the need to halt violence and to implement the Mitchell recommendations. We call on all international parties, the European Union and the Russian Federation in

particular, to pursue current distinguished efforts to ensure progress, in line with the initiative of the United States Government — namely, to establish a time frame for reaching a definitive solution to this problem.

The elements required for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East will not be attained unless the settlement takes into account the need for full withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from all Arab occupied territories, including withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders.

The Israeli Government is presently exploiting the international situation negatively and has increased its policy of persecution of Syrian citizens who live in the Golan. Moreover, the same Government has tried to destroy property belonging to Syrian citizens in that area and has increased its settlement activities. These Israeli practices and activities must cease.

We call upon Israel to stop its constant threats against the security and sovereignty of sisterly Lebanon. Its withdrawal from South Lebanon, including the Shabaa Farms, must be completed so that the Lebanese Government will be able to devote its attention to development, reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. We call upon the international community to continue giving the necessary support to the Lebanese Government in this respect.

In conclusion, we hope that next year, when we take up the discussion on this agenda item again, we will have witnessed some positive developments, thus fulfilling our hopes and aspirations for peace and stability in the Middle East region. This will not be achieved until all members of the international community realize that the main reason for tension in the region has to be solved. We believe this to be the only way that we can fulfil our aspirations for peace in the region.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) *(spoke in Arabic)*: This year the General Assembly is discussing two items — the Middle East and the question of Palestine — amid some extremely important regional and international indicators. The terrorist attacks carried out against the United States have cast a shadow on our work throughout the past two months.

As regards the Middle East, in spite of all the efforts to bring the peace process back on track, we have noticed terrible procrastination on the part of the Israeli Government, which has declared policies that are contrary to peace and international legitimacy. Today's date coincides with the tenth anniversary of the convocation of the Madrid Peace Conference, through which Syria has tried, sincerely and in cooperation with the international community, to pave the way for a real, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The serious and purposeful negotiations carried out by Syria all these years have demonstrated two important facts to the international community: first, that Israel is not serious about achieving a just and comprehensive peace in accordance with United Nations resolutions; and secondly, that Syria has the right to full restoration of the Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 without any bargaining.

However, we have always felt shocked at Israel's procrastination, arrogance, denial of rights and attempt to avoid the establishment of peace. In fact, Israel has carried out what was pledged by its then Prime Minister — namely, to make these negotiations revolve in a vicious cycle for 10 years. This has led to dangerous and tragic results.

Israel's occupation of the Golan was accompanied by its attempt to promulgate legislation, to take measures and to use all possible methods to annex lands, to do everything it could to build settlements and bring settlers from various parts of the world, thereby violating all international resolutions and pacts. Israel has destroyed and totally effaced urban centres. It has seized water sources and destroyed agriculture and animal wealth, thereby destroying the income of the Syrian Arab citizens in the Golan.

I would like to mention that the number of displaced persons, those who were expelled by Israel in 1967, has reached about half a million Syrians from the occupied Golan. They are still waiting to return to their lands and homes. In contrast, the number of Israeli settlers in the Golan is increasing. The Israeli occupation authorities have expanded the number of settlements, which now total 40, in flagrant violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981).

Peace cannot coexist with occupation. Peace cannot coexist with the muscle-flexing in which Israel engages every day by killing innocent Palestinians. Syria has always stressed the need for continued action towards the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the implementation of Security

Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), on the basis of the principle of land for peace, and guaranteeing Israel's withdrawal from occupied Syrian and Palestinian territories to the lines of 4 June 1967. Israel should also completely withdraw from Lebanese territory and should release from its prisons all Arab detainees and hostages.

Recently, we have heard some statements that contained positive elements with respect to reactivating the peace process and drawing attention to the explosive situation in the Middle East. It is our hope that these will be complemented by concrete steps to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands and to force Israel to respect international legitimacy and implement the relevant Security Council resolutions. Our people, who for decades have been resisting Israeli occupation and repression, want a genuine commitment to implement United Nations resolutions on all tracks, to put an end to the occupation of all occupied Arab territories and to withdraw to the lines of 4 June 1967. We believe that if the co-sponsors of the peace process, the European Union and the United Nations do not strive seriously to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, this opportunity will again be lost, which would have dangerous consequences in this important and sensitive region.

His Excellency Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, has made it clear that Syria is consistently committed to peace as a strategic option with a view to the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. That is true in spite of extremely difficult developments in the peace process.

On the other hand, Israel gives daily proof that it is against a just and comprehensive peace: the wish for peace can never be consistent with the wish to kill. The assassinations, which are admitted, are no evidence of a true wish to attain genuine, stable peace and can never lead to stability in the region.

Israel accuses every Arab who resists its occupation, repression and massacres of terrorism. For many years, Syria has called on the international community to condemn all forms of terrorism, especially the State terrorism practiced by Israel. It is useful here to recall the well known fact that throughout its history our region never knew the phenomenon of terrorism until the establishment, on a religious basis, of Israel in 1948, which resulted from the activities of notorious terrorist organizations that sowed the seeds of fear and terror in Palestine and beyond it. It is unfortunate that Israel, which has excelled in the practice of terrorism in order to maintain its occupation of Arab territories and its expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and their lands, and which has carried out so many massacres, has not been held accountable for its crimes.

The Palestinian people thus realized that their only option for emerging from despair and frustration, in the face of international indifference, was to engage in repeated intifadas to resist occupation and to liberate its land and restore its dignity — as enjoyed by all the world's other peoples.

In the course of its 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Israel committed the most atrocious crimes, particularly shelling Beirut and blockading it for more than 80 days. It killed thousands of innocent Lebanese civilians; it destroyed the country's infrastructure; it perpetrated horrific massacres, for example at Sabra and Shatila. In the face of Israel's atrocities and its arrogant use of force, the only option open to the Lebanese people was perseverance and resistance to the occupation. The Lebanese resistance succeeded in confronting Israeli occupation and in expelling it from most Lebanese territory. No one in the world should forget that the battles of resistance were waged on occupied Lebanese lands and were waged against Israeli occupation forces — whereas Israeli occupation forces have killed thousands of Lebanese civilians and have more than once destroyed Lebanon's infrastructure.

In his recent statement to the General Assembly, Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, stressed that those who wish to target terrorism in our region should, first and foremost, target Israeli terrorism. Because what Israel is perpetrating is the worst form of terrorism.

Peace is the desire and the will to comply in full with decisions of international legitimacy. Peace is not just empty words; it is reality on the ground and practice of it. It is not misrepresentations and myths that seek to conceal massacres and atrocities. Continued Israeli occupation means that resistance to it is legitimate. Those who think they can put a stop to resistance and to the intifada are mistaken. They will continue as long as the occupation continues. The Israeli Government would be wrong to think it can

impose security before regional peace is achieved, because security is the result and the logical outcome of peace.

Mr. Al-Jomae (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The item before the Assembly today is entitled "The situation in the Middle East". It has been on the agenda for 56 years, and the United Nations is 56 years old. In the historic Millennium Declaration, third-world and other countries affirmed their commitment to the Charter, to sovereign equality among States and to the right of peoples to self-determination.

Yesterday and earlier today, we discussed Palestine, and we said that the solution of the Middle East question depended on the solution of the Palestinian problem, and that the solution of the Palestinian problem involved the implementation of United Nations resolutions, the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of Palestinian refugees or the provision of compensation if they choose not to return.

The solution to the Palestinian problem should therefore be based on these three premises. That is why the Government of my country reiterates its appeal to the States involved in the peace process to put an end to the bloodshed and to oblige Israel to abide by the provisions of international law and by the resolutions of the Organization, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace.

All the States of the region except Israel have acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Israel refuses to do so or to submit its nuclear facilities to international verification, which poses a grave threat to peace and stability in the region.

Saudi Arabia is deeply concerned about this problem. We wish the Middle East to be free of all nuclear weapons and thus find Israel's refusal problematic. We also reject the use of any double standard, such as exempting Israel from the obligation to accede to the NPT.

Respect for international legality and for obligations undertaken are the twin pillars of security and stability. The tensions experienced by our region and the cycle of violence have no other cause than Israel's non-respect for international law and for the resolutions of the Organization.

The stability to which we aspire is dependent on Israel's immediate withdrawal from the Golan and from Shab'a farms in southern Lebanon. We believe, therefore, that the international community should play an active role in the region to ensure respect for international legality.

Postponement of the date of recess

The President: I should like to draw the attention of members to the date of recess of the current session. Members will recall that at its 3rd plenary meeting, on 19 September 2001, the General Assembly decided that the fifty-sixth session would recess on Tuesday, 11 December 2001.

However, I have been informed by the Chairmen of the Second and Fifth Committees that the Committees will not be able to conclude their work by 11 December 2001. Hence, the Assembly will not be able to conclude its work by that date. I should like, therefore, to propose to the Assembly that it postpone the date of recess of the current session to Friday, 21 December 2001.

If there is no objection, may I take it that the Assembly agrees to this proposal?

It was so decided.

Programme of work

The President: In the light of the decision just adopted to extend the date of recess of the current session, I should now like to make an announcement concerning the programme of work of the General Assembly.

I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/56/3/Add.2, which covers the period from 3 through 14 December 2001 and which is now being distributed to Member States in the Hall.

The lists of speakers for the items mentioned in document A/INF/56/3/Add.2 are open.

The General Assembly, in due course, will be kept informed of the dates for the consideration of other agenda items, as well as of any additional changes.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.